

**Connecticut River Atlantic Salmon Commission
Meeting Minutes
October 23, 2002**

Agenda Items

1. Call to Order, Determination of Quorum, Approval of Today's Agenda & Minutes of Last Meeting

Vice Chair Wayne MacCallum called the meeting to order at 10:10 a.m.

Mr. MacCallum noted that Chair Ed Parker and all other agency representatives from Connecticut were absent because of their fiscal situation and resulting travel restrictions. Mr. Eric Palmer was introduced as the new official alternate for the Vermont Division of Fish and Wildlife.

There was no change to the agenda.

Mr. Bob Jones moved to accept the Minutes from the January 23, 2002 meeting. Mr. Charlie Thoits seconded the motion and the Minutes were approved.

2. Report of the Executive Assistant

Ms. Janice Rowan provided a brief report on Commission activities in 2002 followed by a report of the Commission's financial transactions and correspondence (attached).

Discussion: Mr. MacCallum said that the DOI award was an honor and it was a platform from which to pursue additional funds. Mr. Jaime Geiger agreed and pointed out that, by all indications, the CRASC trip to Washington was well received, effective and efficient.

3. Report of the Technical Committee Chair

Mr. Jay McMenemy provided a summary of the activities of the Technical Committee (attached).

Discussion: Mr. Geiger thanked Mr. McMenemy for a thorough report and gave kudos to the Technical Committee for finding an innovative approach to continue genetic marking research at the White River NFH. Mr. Geiger apologized to the Commission and the Technical Committee for the appearance of making a unilateral decision about smolt production at the White River NFH. He asked that the Technical Committee instead consider smolt production at the White River NFH a proposal and motioned that the Technical Committee evaluate the proposal and report back to the Commission on feasibility. The motion was seconded by Mr. Bob Jones. All agreed.

Mr. MacCallum asked why the fry stocking goal, once nearly achieved, has lately been short of the goal and whether this was impacting the number of adult returns. Mr. McMenemy replied

that the rate of adult returns is a function of marine survival. In fact, production over the past decade has generally been stable or improved, stocking densities are moderate, quality of fry is high, and timing of production is good. Assessment data indicates that freshwater smolt survival is good. Additional information is collected on emigrating smolts through an annual recapture study on the mainstem at Holyoke and from acoustic tag research conducted by the Conte lab. Further evaluation on survival of smolts in the estuary, for example, is worth doing but is expected to cost upwards of \$200K which is currently beyond the means of the program.

Mr. Geiger affirmed that missing information on smolt emigration in the estuary is critically important to understanding low adult returns. Mr. MacCallum added that resources may need to be redirected to address such high priority needs given the current state and federal fiscal situation.

An example of a current funding concern is the cost of PIT tags (est. \$10K) needed for marking brood stock used in the genetic marking study. There is currently no stable annual source of funds which places the program evaluation at risk every year.

Mr. Geiger asserted that though the fiscal situation is extreme, it is critical that the Commission continue to conduct evaluations to document success in the restoration of salmon and other migratory fish, maintain sound science, maintain the partnership, and conduct outreach to demonstrate the value of the program.

The Commission agreed to wait for the Fish Passage Subcommittee to review the 2002 shad passage study results and develop recommendations for future improvement of passage at the Turners Falls dam. This issue will be addressed at the next Commission meeting.

The Commission made minor changes to the draft letter from the Commission to USGen requiring downstream passage at the Fifteen Mile Falls project. Mr. Tom Menard motioned to accept the letter, Mr. Geiger seconded the motion, and all agreed to charge the Coordinator with finalizing the letter for signature by the Chair.

The Commission agreed to review the *Draft management plan for blueback herring in the Connecticut River basin* with the intention of discussing and finalizing the plan at the next Commission meeting.

4. Update on CRASC Re-Authorization and Funding Initiative & Discussion on New CRASC Strategy for Re-authorization/Funding in 2003 & 2004

Ms. Rowan provided an overview of the revised Connecticut River Atlantic Salmon Commission funding initiative (attached).

Discussion: Mr. Geiger explained that the USFWS salmon program has been level funded with no significant increases over an extended period. During that same time, the program has experienced uncontrollable increases in cost from payroll, etc. The net effect on the program has been a decrease in funding. The actual allocation is determined regionally with increasing influence by the Washington Office since the salmon listing in Maine.

Mr. MacCallum pointed out that he is Chair of the Federal Budget Committee for the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies. The Committee reviews federal agency budget proposals every February. He indicated that, if the allocations are determined at this level, he would put this issue on his radar screen this winter.

Mr. Geiger agreed saying that the 2004 President's budget will be submitted in February, and that he is optimistic that this will present an opportunity for the Commission to once again highlight the importance and relevance of the program to key people in Washington. He encouraged the Commissioners to take the responsibility to do as much as possible now to keep the issue continuously on the front burner.

The fact that Congress has not finalized the Department of Interior budget for 2003 and is expected to delay action on the budget until after the elections, or later depending on election results, may provide the Commission with an additional opportunity to obtain funding via an add in an Omnibus funding bill. This opportunity may provide additional justification for a follow-up trip to DC after the election, potentially in December. The team, led by Mr. Duncan McInnes in September, has laid the foundation for this visit, as well as for discussing 2004 funding needs.

The revised funding package was discussed. The package is considered to be realistic. It does a good job of identifying past accomplishments and needs. There is some concern that it does not capitalize sufficiently on the partnership and the level of match provided by partners to the program, but it was agreed that the table of expenditures and presentation included this concept. The habitat segment of the package was generally considered to be acceptable even given the detail because of its broad approach. It was affirmed that the package was a request for funds in addition to the existing funding level - not a request for re-allocation of funds. It was re-affirmed that both new and existing funding would remain in the program.

The Commission generally endorsed the package and agreed to have it forwarded informally to Ms. Loretta Beaumont, House Appropriations, for comment before it is distributed widely by the Commissioners to Congressionals and other key supporters. The Commission charged the Coordinator with informally forwarding the package to Ms. Beaumont and providing the Commission with feedback.

The Commission concurred with a need for follow-up with House Resources staff to ensure that the revised language for an appropriation authorization is added to an existing Fisheries bill.

The Commission charged Mr. McInnes with follow-up to the previous Washington visit and continuing the lead in future visits to Washington, as strategy and opportunity require. Mr. MacCallum indicated that he would be in DC in December and could independently make visits to key persons while there.

5. Other Business

The Connecticut River Atlantic Salmon Commission Research Forum is scheduled for February 11, 2003 at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Regional Office auditorium in Hadley Massachusetts. A call for speakers has been sent out and all are encouraged to share this announcement with others who may be interested in participating.

The Department of Interior award to the Commission received press coverage and an article from The Recorder was clipped for the Commissioners to read.

Mr. Carroll expressed a concern that the educational programs associated with the Atlantic salmon restoration program are not well publicized. Many Congressional contacts were unaware of the extent of the effort but were generally interested and supportive when informed. The education program is receiving positive recognition and Mr. Carroll gave the following examples: One of the veteran teachers in the Connecticut program is a delegate representing Rhode Island, Connecticut and Massachusetts in the National Science Teachers Association. She won a commendation for a paper on the salmon education program. Salmon Association members and a teacher in the Connecticut program gave papers on the history of the salmon restoration program and on the basin-wide education program at the National Marine Science Teachers Association. And, the Ledyard Middle School won a National Science Award for the salmon program.

Mr. Carroll also announced that the Connecticut River Salmon Association has poster-size Connecticut River watershed maps, printed on durable vinyl with grommets for easy-hanging, available for a cost of \$30. Those interested in obtaining a map can contact him directly.

6. Selection of Meeting dates for 2003

Mr. Geiger moved to schedule the next Commission meeting dates on January 16, 2003 and October 22, 2003. Mr. Thoits seconded the motion, all approved, and the meeting dates were set for the coming year.

Mr. Thoits moved to adjourn the meeting. The meeting was adjourned at 12:30 p.m.

CRASC Meeting Attendance
October 23, 2002

Janice Rowan	USFWS
Jaime Geiger	USFWS
Thomas D. Menard	MA Public Representative
Wayne MacCallum	MAFW
Charles F. Thoits III	NH Public Representative
Maryalice Fischer	PG&E National Energy Group
Jim Carroll	Connecticut River Salmon Association
David Deen	Connecticut River Watershed Council
Gabe Gries	NHFG
Caleb Slater	MAFW
Darleen Cutting	USFWS
Ryan Mertz	Student Conservation Association
Phil Herzig	USFWS
Bob Stira	Northeast Generation Services
Eric Palmer	VTFW
Jay McMenemy	VTFW
Bob Jones	CT Public Representative
Larry Lofton	USFWS
Warren Fischer	Volunteer NH/VT
Rose Fischer	Volunteer NH/VT